RESEARCH

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CASE DECISIONS IN A STATE PAROLE SYSTEM

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"The divergence between the real and the ideal may be reduced by acting so as to manipulate the real. But it may also be reduced by adjusting the ideal."

Kenneth Boulding

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INTRODUCTION

Correctional Objectives. Correctional systems, comprising prisons and parole, are given responsibility for protecting society through the control of identified offenders. The means available for control are both external (through confinement and surveillance) and internal (through rehabilitation). Rehabilitation is expected to lessen the likelihood of return to criminal pursuits, and recidivism rates are supposed to measure the extent to which this has been accomplished. One of the stated objectives of a correctional system, and the one to which most attention is usually directed, is to "minimize" recidivism. Parole provides a setting in which a modicum of external control exists and one in which treatment processes may be extended, but it is, primarily, the testing ground for the entire system.

Any separate program or operation within the correctional system, regardless of its immediate and specific aim, is likely to be initially justified on the basis of its presumed relevance to the lowering of recidivism, and the operation will be evaluated on the basis of its effect on the parole revocation rate. Specific criteria are sometimes developed with reference to particular programs, and the evaluation is made in accordance with these (e.g., measured grade improvement of inmates exposed to academic instruction, post-release job attainment of those who receive vocational training, or changes in psychological test performances of inmates or parolees in group counseling), but the question which almost always takes precedence is,what percent of offenders in the program violated parole, as compared to the same type offenders who did not receive it? An unequivocal answer is usually unobtainable, because few programs have operated under an adequately controlled research design. In those programs where adequacy has been approached (i.e., those controlling for "expected" performance through the employment of randomized assignment, actuarial risk classification, cohort follow-up), statistically significant and positive outcome findings have been rare and the percent differences disappointingly slight when compared against the expenditures invested to obtain them.[1] It becomes important to examine just what is being measured by the parole revocation criterion.

The Criterion of Effectiveness. Confinement (or reconfinement) is usually viewed as an undesirable but necessary step taken in response to certain damages or dangers suffered by the community. When a recidivism rate rises, persons who accept these rates as a fairly direct index of parolee performances are quick to assume that the rise reflects a deterioration in the quality of offenders passing through the system. Other persons, stressing the indirect quality of the link between offender behavior and official dispositions, assume instead that the rise may reflect merely a change in policy or in the techniques of counting:

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[1] Within the California Department of Corrections, the Pilot Intensive Counseling Organization, the Intensive Treatment Project, the Special Intensive Parole Unit, the Increased Correctional Effectiveness Project, the Narcotic Treatment-Control Program, and the Parole Work Unit Program.

> "The evaluation of prison programs aimed at changing behavior must ask the question: Do formal parole dispositions reflect only parolee behavior, or are there other sources of variance of parole violation rates, stemming from the parole decision itself?"[2]

There is considerable evidence accumulating which indicates that these dispositions are a function of the decision-maker--evidence usually in the form of statistical disparities in decision practices which may not be plausibly attributed to client differences. These sources of variance, once isolated, are more easily subject to control than those stemming from client behavior; consequently, they promise an economical opportunity for dramatic shifts in recidivism rates and reduction in public costs.

The Context of the Problem. The problems of evaluation based upon rates of official or administrative dispositions are, of course, compounded by the fact that discovery of antisocial behavior, rule infractions, or disturbing signs of imminent danger is related to the quantity of resources expended in surveillance. Thus, a rise in violation rate can be interpreted as a demonstration of program effectiveness: it is not that "treatment" is failing, but that "control" has become more effective. Because the correctional system is a system, remote policy changes which alter rates of release from prison to parole or of discharges from institutions or parole create disequilibria which can reverberate until they affect violation rates, adding to the confusion about program effects. Changes in the economic conditions or political climate of the broader society can produce problems of either prison overcrowding or population deficit, with derivative consequences for the parole violation rate. At times, a dramatic incident involving a single parolee, especially if well publicized, is sufficient to set defensive processes in motion in the agency which may result in substantial and lasting effects upon the overall violation rate.

The Revocation Decision. In most correctional systems, the responsibility for the decision concerning reconfinement rests largely in the hands of the paroling board. While some parolees are returned by the courts with new felony convictions, a large number are subject to review for technical violations of parole and are returned by the parole board to complete their original terms. A typical procedure is for such a board to read a violation report prepared by the parole officer, then to decide on the basis of that report whether to continue the offender on parole or to return him to prison. If the decision is for return, the parolee himself will not be seen by the board until he is once again inside the prison, at which time he is confronted with the charges against him but not usually with all the evidence upon which the charges rest. The parolee's opportunity to prepare a defense or to appeal the decision is quite limited throughout the revocation proceedings. Thus, the entire process pivots largely upon a single written report and on the recommendation of its author, who is not himself present for the hearing. Though the decision itself rests within the hands of the parole board, the board is placed in a dependent position and thus is likely to rely heavily upon the recommendation of the parole officer. The officer, in writing the report, is preparing a form of brief; whether he arrives at his recommendation on the basis of the information he collects and reports, or whether he selects information for reporting which will support a recommendation already arrived at, is difficult to determine. The report will contain both facts and inferences, and the interpretations made from identical information may vary widely from one officer to another. Officers also will differ in the types of known information they choose to suppress or screen out of the written report, and in the types of information which their individual search procedure will bring to their own attention.

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[2] Martinson, R., Kassebaum, G., & Ward, D. "A Critique of Research in Parole," Federal Probation, Vol. 28, No. 3, September 1964.

PAROLE OUTCOME IN CALIFORNIA

In California, state-wide trends over the period 1960-1965 showed an increasing proportion of unfavorable outcomes for parolees. This resulted primarily from a rise in the number of those who were returned to prison to finish term, particularly those returned on technical violations. Meanwhile, there was an almost constant rate for parole violators returned with a new prison commitment. Thus, the increased violation rate was almost wholly a function of the behavior of decision-makers within the state correctional agency, thereby attesting to the position that the exercise of administrative discretion of the sort involved in the technical return can have a significant impact upon the apparent effects of a program.

The awareness of the possibilities for choice among policy options as well as variability in the interpretation of fixed policies is critical to the understanding of outcome statistics. It follows that since decision-making behavior is of such consequence, recidivism rates and public cost can be reduced (or increased) merely through changing parole agent behavior (decision criteria) without any expectation that it would mediate change in parolee behavior, as well as through changing agents (training) for the purpose of mediating parolee behavior change (treatment gain).

Statistics on parole dispositions over a number of years revealed that some parole offices in the state produced lower violation rates than others. With the introduction of a control for differences among offices in terms of their actuarial risk of return to prison for parolees, statistically significant deviations from the actuarially "expected" performance still remained for a number of the offices. Among the empirical findings, in addition to performance differences among offices for the same period, were differences within offices over time[3] and differences among individual agents.[4]

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[3] Jaman, Dorothy, and Mueller, P. "Evaluation of Parole Outcome by Parole Districts of Release, 1957-60 Releases," Research Report No. 21, Measurement Development Section, Research Division, California Department of Corrections, 1965.

[4] Robison, J. "Progress Notes: Toward the Proposed Study of Parole Operations," San Francisco Research Unit, 1965, unpublished.

In addition, documentation that the paroling board--the official administrative decision-making body--closely followed the original report recommendation was obtained when Robison determined that nearly 80 percent of the recommendations of parole agents against revocation and over 90 percent of their recommendations for revocation were accepted by the Adult Authority. Similar findings are available from the Federal probation system. Investigators determined, in regard to sentencing alternatives, wide variation (from 26 to 86 percent) among probation officers in the percent of presentence cases for whom probation was recommended, and high acceptance rates by the courts of these recommendations. "...Where probation is recommended, it is granted in 96% of the cases. Where imprisonment is recommended, that disposition is made 88% of the time."[5]

PILOT STUDIES

Since it was evident that parolee dispositions (violation rates) were not direct indices of parolee behavior and that these measures were influenced by variables within communities and the correctional agency, pilot studies aimed at some specification of the operant variables in these dispositions were undertaken by the authors of this paper and some of their co-workers.

Community Factors. In the first of these pilot studies, parole offices were rank-ordered on the basis of the direction and magnitude of difference between expected and observed performances of parolees released to them. Noting that the "unfavorable outcome" criterion was a composite--in that if any of several alternative "most serious dispositions" (e.g., jail sentence of 90 or more days, prison return WNC [with new commitment], prison return TFT [to finish term]) was accorded a parolee, the parolee's outcome was classified as unfavorable--the investigators rank-ordered offices on each of the separate outcome components and compared these rankings. Their findings were:

1. A strong inverse relationship (Spearman's rho = -.754, $p < .01$) existed across offices between the incidence of long jail sentences and of prison returns to finish term.

2. Across offices, neither long jail sentences nor prison returns to finish term were significantly related to prison returns with new commitment (rho: long jail vs. return WNC = +.121; rho return TFT vs. return WNC = -.166; rho necessary for significance at $p < .05$ = .455, at $p < .01$ = .644, one-tailed tests).

3. A direct and significant relationship was found across parole offices between expected-observed performance differences and the TFT rate; districts with a high observed vs. expected outcome difference had a higher incidence of prison returns to finish term (rho = .634, $p < .05$). Offices with higher incidences of long jail outcome fared better than those with low in terms of expected vs. observed differences, but not significantly so (rho = -.249).

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[5] Lohman, J., Wahl, A., & Carter, R. "Presentence Report Recommendations and Demographic Data," Research Report No. 5, San Francisco Project, 1966.

These findings were interpreted as suggesting that long jail sentences and technical returns to prison were true alternatives and raised the question "How much discretion exists within the parole district office regarding the choice between these alternatives?" They speculated that the prison return TFT might, in part, be a response to a deficit in available jail facilities within the geographic area covered by a parole office, and constructed a jail capacity index (daily jail population vs. total county population) on which parole districts were compared. They found a positive (rho = .567, $p < .05$) relationship between the incidence of long jail sentences accorded parolees and the index of jail capacity for the districts' area of supervision; an inverse (rho = -.497, $p < .05$) relationship was found to exist between prison returns TFT and the local county jail capacity.

The conclusion was that since parole units which appeared to be doing more poorly than expected in terms of unfavorable disposition were those with a higher utilization of technical prison return, and that since such districts tended to cover geographic areas with a relative deficit in county jail capacity, support was provided for the hypothesis that parole districts' performances as ordinarily evaluated (obtained vs. expected with B.E. control for parolee risk level) were partially constrained or facilitated by local community factors external to the state correctional agency. An individual parole office might, then, be "victimized" by its environment rather than by the quality of parolees assigned to it. Thus, a variable within the community was linked to "unsuccessful" offender outcomes.

Parole Agent and Office Factors. While the preceding study looked beyond the correctional agency for factors connected with violation rates, a second pilot study focused on variables within the agency. This study looked at two parole district offices--one which historically had a low rate of technical parole violation and another with a high rate. Identical sets of stimuli (nine actual parolee case histories in which behavior had occurred which prompted a consideration of violation) were submitted to the agents in both offices with a request to make recommendations on these cases to either continue the subject on parole or return him to prison. The findings of this study were:

1. A difference in "violation rate" existed between the two offices on the standardized task, and this difference corresponded to their actual histories of performance.
2. No agent among the 14 in the experiment produced sets of recommendations which agreed, above a level expected by chance, with the actual case recommendations. (Responses ranged from 9 out of 9 "return to prison" recommendations by one agent, to 9 out of 9 "continue on parole" recommendations by another agent.)
3. Questionnaire responses to items about parole practice indicated differing orientations among agents in the two offices, and these orientations tended to be associated with the differences in parole outcome.

The present paper is concerned with the problem of variation in agent recommendations across district offices and regional areas. The study is a replication of the second pilot study expanded to include all the units in a state parole agency.

PROCEDURE

All members of the staff of the Parole and Community Services Division of the California Department of Corrections were the subjects. These included 260 caseload-carrying agents, 38 unit office supervisors, 5 regional administrators, and 15 additional members from regional and headquarters staff, including the chief of the parole agency. Data collection was completed within a six-week period in late 1965.

Two sets of data were collected from the subjects. The first set consisted of responses to a questionnaire with the usual demographic items, career plan items, professional versus administrative conflict items, and an assortment of items on actual parole operations in the areas of pre-release, supervision, and case decision-making. The second set consisted of responses to ten actual parolee case histories already processed by the parole agency and the parole board. The case histories were abstracted and summarized. In each case, an emergency (or incident) had occurred and the subjects were requested to make a decision on what they would do if they were handling the cases, i.e., recommend "return to prison" or "continue on parole." Thus, data were obtained from subjects who were all members of the same organization, were governed by the same rules and regulations, had the same parole board in mind in arriving at their case recommendations, and responded to a constant set of stimuli (case histories).

RESULTS--HYPOTHETICAL PERFORMANCE

The Case Stimuli. A capsule description for each of the ten cases is presented in Table 1, which also shows the caseload-carrying parole agents' recommended dispositions on these cases. Overall, for the ten cases selected for the study, about two-thirds of the agents' recommendations were "return to prison" and one-third "continue on parole." Recommendation patterns for individual cases ranged in severity from one case which 90 percent of the agents chose to "continue on parole" to another which 93 percent chose to "return to prison."

The Respondents' Recommendation Distribution. The subjects had been asked to provide a recommendation of either "return to prison" or "continue on parole" for each of the ten cases presented to them. An individual subject could conceivably have decided to "return" as few as zero or as many as ten of the cases. Table 2 presents the distribution of recommendations for all 318 subjects (supervisors and administrators included).

About half the subjects (49 percent) decided to return either six or seven of the cases. The range among the 318 was from one agent who chose to continue all but one case on parole to five agents who chose to return all ten to prison. Even subjects who continued the same number of cases on parole were not often in agreement about which of the cases they would continue. For example, the most frequent number of continue recommendations was three cases (seven returns), produced by 88 subjects; these 88 arrived at three continues in over twenty different ways (e.g., cases A, C, & I, or cases D, E, & G, or cases A, H, and I), and every one of the ten cases appeared in at least one of these combinations of three.

TABLE 1

THE CASE STIMULI

Case	Commitment Offense, Parole Adjustment	Precipitating Incident	Supporting Evidence	Parole Agents Recommending Return to Prison N = 260
A	Narcotics: common-law relationship; sporadic employment.	Sexually molesting 8-year-old girls.	Allegation by common-law wife who said S wanted to desert. Case dismissed for witnesses' lack of cooperation.	10%
I	Forgery/Robbery: a good, steady employee; in stable common-law relationship.	Market robbery	Robbery vehicle identified as S's, was later found to have gun under seat. Loot from robbery found in S's pocket, but S definitely in bar when crime committed. Another man confessed, claiming he had taken S's car without permission and planted money on S. Robbery charges against S dropped.	37%
E	Crime vs. Nature/ Burglary: unmotivated and unskilled, meager earnings; lives in communal situations.	Failure to register, and PAL 3 mos.; usually dependent upon P&CS for meal and hotel tickets.	S vague about activities/ whereabouts; states supervision is too restricting, and wants to be left alone so long as he doesn't hurt anybody.	63%
G	Burglary: employment satisfactory; excessive drinking; satisfactory home adjustment.	Three reports of indecent exposure in one evening.	S's vehicle positively identified, S tentatively identified. S admitted drinking but denied exposures. Lie detector results equivocal. Victims unwilling to bring charges.	63%
C	Narcotics: good employee; supports family adequately, but has stormy relationship with wife.	Wifebeating and abducting own children.	Convicted for malicious mischief and resisting arrest. Sentenced to six months probation.	65%

J	Burglary: Sporadic employment; lives with and supported by mother.	Narcotics sale.	Informant reported S engaged in sale. Heroin and gun found in girlfriend's home. S had fresh needle marks, but passed nalline. Case dismissed. Illegal search and seizure, lack of direct tie of evidence to S.	80%
B	Extortion: lives alone in hotel; receives small pension.	Loitering in men's room with sheriff-type badge.	Admission of intent to extort, but denial of criminal act. Case dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence.	82%
D	Burglary: good worker, but acts peculiarly toward customers; wastes earnings; wife unhappy with him.	Entering strange bedroom windows to proposition sleeping women. Intoxicated.	Charged with attempted rape. Only victim who could identify S was unwilling to testify. S found not guilty by jury.	90%
H	Narcotics: unemployed and unavailable for supervision; nomadic; sometimes lives on wife's ANC support.	Wanted for questioning about burglaries and forged checks. Investigation for welfare fraud.	Charged only with welfare fraud. Charge dismissed. S unable to account for whereabouts or activities. No evidenced income, but possessed large quantity of personal belongings.	92%
F	Narcotics: unemployed but willing to work; fair relationship with family	Liquor store robbery and dairy robbery involving assault.	Charged with robbery. Implicated by alleged accomplices, but victims unable to positively identify. Charges dropped.	93%

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF RETURN RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEN CASES

(N = 318)

	Zero	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Total
Number of Respondents	0	1	2	7	26	36	67	88	53	33	5	318
Percent of Respondents	0.0	0.3	0.6	2.2	8.2	11.3	21.1	27.6	16.7	10.4	1.6	100.0

Variability in the responses of different individuals to a common stimulus is, of course, to be expected. Nevertheless, it is striking that parole agents given materials based on and very similar to the originals prepared by parole agents, and called upon to arrive at recommendations from the types of information they routinely use in preparing their own violation reports, vary in their responses to the extent they do. The actual "legal" decision-makers for the correctional agency--the members of the Adult Authority--rely most heavily upon violation reports of this sort (and the parole agent recommendations accompanying them) in arriving at the final disposition on actual cases. The variability among agents on case recommendations, as documented above, offers some support for an assertion often heard from parolees: "Whether or not you make it on parole all depends on which agent you happen to get."

Position in the Administrative Hierarchy. The respondents were classified by their position in the organization hierarchy, and the percent of total recommendations which were to "continue" was obtained for each class.

TABLE 3

PERCENT CONTINUE RECOMMENDATIONS
BY POSITION IN THE PAROLE AGENCY

Number of Subjects	Position in Agency	Percent "Continue" Recommendations
20	Administrators & HQ Staff	45.0%
38	Unit Supervisors (PA III)	38.4%
33	Ass't Supervisors (PA II)	34.8%
227	Parole Agents (PA I)	32.4%
318	All Subjects	34.2%

The lowest status members in the agency hierarchy (Parole Agents I) tended to recommend to continue least often (or conversely, to be most likely to recommend return to prison); at each step up in organizational rank there was an increase in the proportion of recommendations to continue. Given identical case stimuli, caseload-carrying agents (PA I--full caseload; PA II--half caseload) produce an average of 3.27 continues (33 percent) for the ten cases, while those in full supervisory or administrative positions average 4.07 (41 percent). In Table 4, respondents are cross-classified on the basis of whether they carry actual caseloads and whether the number of continue recommendations they offered was above the median for all subjects.

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF "CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS BY POSITION IN THE AGENCY

Position	"Continue" Recommendations		Total
	Three or Fewer	Four or More	
Supervisory, Administrative	19 (33%)	39 (67%)	58
Line, Caseload-carrying	160 (62%)	100 (38%)	260
All Subjects	179	139	318

X^2 (1 d.f.) = 14.81, $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

Thus, for the cases used as stimuli in the present study, a statistically significant difference exists between the recommendations of caseload-carrying agents and those in supervisory or administrative positions, with the former class being more "conservative" in their judgments of appropriate case dispositions.

Geographic Region. At the time these data were collected, the state was divided into five parole regions, with a separate regional administrator for each area. Each region contained from six to ten parole unit offices. The regional administrator was the final level of review within the parole division on violation reports prepared by the parole agent for submission to the parole board, and the administrator or his representative was the person in attendance before the parole board when the case was presented for disposition. The agent's written recommendation was appended to the report, and the agent's unit supervisor, as well as the regional administrator, might add his own written agreement with or dissent from the agent's recommendation.

The case recommendation data were examined to determine whether there were differences in recommendation pattern among the five geographic regions (Table 5). Though regions varied from one in which 34 percent of the subjects recommended four or more cases be continued to another with 48 percent, the differences among regions were not found to be statistically significant (X^2, 4 d.f. = 4.03, $p < .50$, two-tailed).

The Parole Unit Office. A typical parole unit office is staffed by a unit supervisor, an assistant supervisor, and six parole agents. In the data which follow, no distinction has been made between the parole agents and the assistant supervisors, who also carry a partial caseload. Thirty-eight offices were represented in the study. The case recommendations for the two most extreme offices are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 5

"CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS BY PAROLE REGION

(Parole Agents and Unit Supervisors)

Region	Total Subjects	Subjects Continuing Above-Median Number of Cases	Average Continued
III	52	25 (48.1%)	3.52
IV	72	33 (45.8%)	3.68
II	64	29 (45.3%)	3.48
V	63	22 (34.9%)	3.78
I	47	16 (34.0%)	3.13
State	298	125 (41.9%)	3.34

TABLE 6

"CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS IN TWO EXTREME UNIT OFFICES

			Number of Cases Continued					
Number of Subjects	Zero	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven
5		X						
4		X			O			
3		X			O		O	
2		X		X	O		O	
1		XS	X	XO	O		OS	

X: Agent in office X
O: Agent in office O
S: Office supervisor

The average number of cases continued ranged from 1.62 in office X to 4.62 in office O. In office X, where the supervisor continued only one of the ten cases, there were only two agents who continued as many as three; in office O, the supervisor continued six cases, and only one agent there continued as few as three. It has long been generally believed in this agency that the unit supervisor sets the tone of the office. Further attention will be paid to the matter of correspondence between the recommendations of supervisors and their agents at a later point in this report. First, however, the case recommendation data will be examined against the parole agents' career backgrounds in terms of educational specialty and prior work experience.

Parole Agent Background, Education. Over three-fourths of the caseload-carrying parole agents in the study were college graduates, and over 90 percent had at least 90 units of college training. In Table 7, for each group of agents indicating a particular area of study, the number and percent of agents responding with more than the median number of recommendations to continue are shown.

TABLE 7

BROAD AREA OF STUDY BY NUMBER AND PERCENT OF SUBJECTS ABOVE MEDIAN ON "CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS

Broad Area of Study	Number of Subjects	Number of Continues Above Median	
Social Work	18	13	(72.2%)
Sociology	50	20	(40.0%)
Psychology	51	19	(37.3%)
Criminology	31	9	(29.0%)
Law, other Social Sciences	30	13	(43.3%)
Education, Humanities	21	6	(28.6%)
Several, Other, No Response	59	20	(33.9%)
Total	260	100	(38.5%)

Among those representing the more clearly defined educational specialties, agents who had majored in Social Work (a fairly small group, numbering 18) appear markedly oriented to continuation, with over 70 percent continuing four or more of the sample cases; agents with a background in Criminology seemed slightly return prone, with less than 30 percent offering as many as four continues. Many of the agents selected more than one alternative among those listed as areas of study, while some specified a different major than any listed, and a few failed to respond. These subjects (several, other, no response) were removed and the median test was applied for the remaining and more clearly defined academic groups. Statistically, a trend association is demonstrated between educational background and orientation to case decision-making (X^2, 5 d.f. = 10.80, $p < .10$, two-tailed).

Parole Agent Background, Prior Work Experience. Parole agents were asked what kind of work they had been doing immediately prior to becoming a parole agent, and their responses were classified into the categories shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8

PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE BY NUMBER AND PERCENT OF SUBJECTS ABOVE MEDIAN ON "CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS

Prior Work Experience	Number of Subjects	Number of Continues Above Median
Social Casework, Welfare	39	19 (48.7%)
Probation, Juvenile Hall	52	23 (44.2%)
Law Enforcement	28	9 (32.1%)
State Corrections: Counselor	34	10 (29.4%)
State Corrections: Officer	51	14 (27.4%)
Other, No Response	56	25 (44.6%)
Total	260	100 (38.5%)

Agents who entered parole service from some other position within the state correctional system and those who came from law enforcement jobs (police, deputy sheriff) appear somewhat more conservative in their recommendations than agents from the remaining groups. Former correctional counselors appear no more lenient than former correctional officers. However, when the large "other, no response" category (which contained former businessmen, students, military men, etc.) was removed and the median test was applied, no statistically significant association was demonstrated between prior work experience and case recommendations (X^2, 4 d.f. = 6.58, $p < .20$, two-tailed).

A Parole Agent Value. In carrying out the task of case supervision, the parole agent is regulated, to a large extent, by minimum contact requirements specified by the parole agency. Similarly, the parole agent manual specifies many conditions under which the preparation and submission of a report is required. Nevertheless, the type of recommendation to be made on a violation report (e.g., return to prison, continue on parole) is always to be decided on the basis of the agent's professional judgment. These judgments are, of course, tempered by what the agent feels is expected of him. On questionnaire items in the present study, a majority of agents agreed that it mattered to them whether their recommendations were accepted and that violation reports were sometimes prepared based upon what the parole board would "buy." The agents were also asked to respond to the question, "If a parole agent wishes to continue working with a case, do you feel he should be permitted to do so even though a 'return' is called for according to policy?"* Table 9 presents the relationship between answers to this question and the number of respondents scoring above the median in continue responses.

TABLE 9

A PAROLE AGENT VALUE AND "CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS

"Should agent be permitted to continue when policy calls for return?"	Number of Subjects	Number of Continues Above Median
"Agree," or "Strongly Agree"	120	52 (43.3%)
"Disagree," or "Strongly Disagree"	134	44 (32.8%)
Total	254**	96

**Six subjects failed to reply.

The average number of cases continued by 28 agents who "strongly agree" with the item was 4.14; 92 who "agreed" averaged 3.42 continues; 99 agents "disagreed" and averaged 3.05; 35 "strongly disagreed" and averaged 2.71.

The median test was applied to the data in Table 9, and a weak association was found to exist between agents' beliefs about whether they should be permitted to continue working with cases despite contrary policy and their performance on the case recommendation task ($X^2 = 2.54$, $p < .10$, one-tailed). The responses of all agents in each office to the value item were averaged to provide an index for comparison against a similarly obtained office index on the case recommendations task. The median test was applied to determine if there was an association between the two measures on an office-by-office basis. The finding was not statistically significant ($X^2 = .95$, $p < .25$, one-tailed).

Agent Perception of the Unit Supervisor. It was mentioned earlier that within the parole agency, the unit supervisor is said to set the tone of the office. In actual cases of parolee violations, the unit supervisor has the right to dissent from the recommendations of his parole agents, but is not empowered to alter or overrule their recommendations. However, since the supervisor ordinarily has more experience in the organization than his subordinates and since he is also in a position of authority over them in regard to many administrative aspects of parole, it is plausible that parole agents orient themselves toward the unit supervisor in their approach to the professional task of determining appropriate case recommendations.

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*Though there are no written and explicit statements requiring the agent to make particular recommendations under particular conditions, agents interpret the high level of acceptance of their recommendations as proof that they are in line with implicit policies. Furthermore, there may be informal "policies" in some offices calling for the return of certain types of cases.

An item on the study questionnaire addressed to parole agents' perceptions of their supervisors asked, "Does your supervisor favor recommending continuance or reinstatement of marginal parolees?" Agreement on this item was compared to agreement on the agent "value" item discussed in the previous section. In Table 10, responses of individual agents are compared in terms of their agreement or disagreement (by agent), and unit offices are compared on an index of agreement (by office). The index of agreement for each office was determined by means of a procedure involving several steps. The first step was to tally for all agents the number of the four types of response--strongly disagree (-2), disagree (-1), agree (+1), strongly agree (+2)--to the agent "value" item and then, using the indicated weights, to take a median of these responses. The median of the responses of the agents in each office is then determined. If the office median is above the median for all agents, then that office is considered, for purposes of this analysis, as favoring the agent "value." The responses to the item relating to the belief about the supervisor are handled in the same way. Therefore, the designation in Table 10 "both in favor" means that the medians of the responses of the agents in each of those 10 offices were above the medians for all agents on both the agent "value" and the supervisor items.

TABLE 10

PAROLE AGENT VALUE AND BELIEF ABOUT UNIT SUPERVISOR REGARDING "CONTINUE"

	By Agent		By Office	
Both in Favor	60	(24%)	10	(26%)
Agent in Favor	60	(24%)	9	(24%)
Supervisor in Favor	53	(21%)	8	(21%)
Neither in Favor	81	(31%)	11	(29%)
Total	254 Agents	(100%)	38 Offices	(100%)

From Table 10, it is evident that responses to the two questionnaire items are not closely associated--whether the comparison is made on the basis of individual agents or of unit offices, nearly half (45%) of the sample is incongruent (i.e., agent values right to continue but believes supervisor disfavors continue on marginal cases, or vice versa). In a statistical test, a trend level association was found on the agent-by-agent data (by agent: X^2, 3 d.f. $= p < .10$, one-tailed; by office: X^2, 3 d.f. $= p < .40$, one-tailed). This is a rather weak indication that agents' orientations coincide with, or are tempered by, the orientation of the supervisor.

In the previous section findings indicated a low-level association between agents valuing the right to continue cases despite policy and their performances on the case recommendation task. In the preceding paragraph, the association between this value and agents' beliefs about their supervisors' orientations is also shown to be slight. The data were next examined to determine whether a correspondence existed between agents' beliefs about their supervisors and their own performance on the case recommendation task (Table 11).

TABLE 11

AGENT "CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS AND
BELIEFS ABOUT UNIT SUPERVISOR

	Above Median by Agent			Above Median by Office		
Agent Belief	Total	Number	Percent	Total	Number	Percent
Supervisor "Favors" Continue	113	55	48.7%	18	12	66.7%
Supervisor "Disfavors" Continue	141	41	29.1%	20	6	30.0%
Total	254 Agents			38 Offices		

The association between parole agents' beliefs about whether their supervisor favors continuation and their own performance on case recommendations is found statistically to be highly significant on the agent-by-agent comparison (X^2, 1 d.f. = 9.43, $p < .005$, one-tailed) and, as well, significant on the office-by-office comparison (X^2, 1 d.f. = 3.16, $p < .05$, one-tailed). Thus, while a supervisor's influence over his agents' value orientation appeared slight, his influence over their performance is quite evident.

The considerable variability found across parole unit offices on the case recommendation task (see section on The Parole Unit Office) warrants the inference that the unit office be considered the most important organizational influence on decision-making. The findings in the present section strongly suggest that the unit supervisor's orientation has a powerful impact on the case recommendations of his subordinates. Whether this impact is associated with informal but direct coercive influence by the supervisor or is a spontaneous outcome of the parole agents' respect for him, unit offices where agents are above the median in believing the supervisor favors continue are more than twice as likely to be above the median for offices on test cases continued by these subordinates (67 percent vs. 30 percent for the remaining offices). This is an association that could only be produced if there is some consistency in belief among the agents within the separate offices. However, since both measures are based on responses from subordinates, there is no guarantee that the belief about the unit supervisor is valid. As a check, the supervisor's own responses to the case recommendation task were compared for each office against his agents' belief about him. Across the 38 districts, a statistically significant association was found to exist (X^2, 1 d.f. = 4.45, $p < .025$, one-tailed) when the median test was applied.

Agents' and Supervisor's Value, Belief, and Performance. In the preceding section, responses to two questionnaire items--one dealing with parole agents' values about their right to continue cases and another directed at whether they believed their supervisor to be in favor of continuing cases--were each found to have some correspondence with their performance on test case recommendations. It was also noted that the tendency to answer both these items in the same direction (Table 10) was not strong. In Table 12, agents have been classified into three categories on the basis of congruence or disparity between value and belief, and these types examined against the case recommendation responses.

TABLE 12

AGENT "CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS VS.
VALUE AND BELIEF ABOUT SUPERVISOR

	Number of Cases Continued		
	Three or Less	Four or More	Total
Neither Favors Continue	59 (73%)	22 (27%)	81 (100%)
One in Favor, Other Against	72 (64%)	41 (36%)	113 (100%)
Both Favor Continue	27 (45%)	33 (55%)	60 (100%)
Total	158	96	254

A large difference exists between the two congruent types ("neither favors continue" and "both favor continue") on the case recommendation task, with the type of agents who believe "both favor continue" more than twice as likely to provide an above-median number of continue recommendations. Within the disparate type (one in favor, other against), which falls between the others on case recommendation responses, are to be found two subtypes--one with the agent favoring and his supervisor seen as opposed and the other with the supervisor favoring and the agent opposed. Thirty-two percent of the former subtype and 42 percent of the latter gave an above-median number of continue recommendations. The median test, applied to the data in Table 12, shows the recommendation difference among the three agent types to be statistically significant (X^2, 2 d.f. = 11.54, $p < .005$, one-tailed). The difference between the two disparate subtypes is not significant (X^2, 1 d.f. = .79, $p < .50$, two-tailed).

Given the findings presented earlier--the correspondence of the agent's belief about the unit supervisor with both his own and the supervisor's performance on the case recommendation task--one would, of course, expect there to be a correspondence between agents and supervisors on case recommendations. In Table 13 unit supervisors have been separated into those who made four or more continue recommendations on the ten test cases, and those who made three or fewer. The recommendation performance of agents under each of the types of supervisor is presented.

TABLE 13

"CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUPERVISORS AND THEIR SUBORDINATES

The Supervisor Continued	The Subordinate Continued				Total	
	Three or Less		Four or More			
Four or More Cases (N = 25 Supervisors)	103	(57%)	77	(43%)	180	(69%)
Three or Less Cases (N = 13 Supervisors)	57	(71%)	23	(29%)	80	(31%)
Total (N = 38 Supervisors)	160 Agents	(62%)	100 Agents	(38%)	260	(100%)

It was noted earlier that the supervisors were generally more likely than subordinates to continue the test cases. In this study two out of three supervisors gave four or more continues, compared to two out of five subordinates. Despite this general difference, the data in Table 13 reveal a statistically significant association between supervisor and subordinate performances (X^2, 1 d.f. = 4.03, $p < .025$, one-tailed).

Caseload Size and Recommendations. At the time the data were collected, the parole agency was nearing the end of its first year in the implementation of a massive new supervision program, the Work Unit Program. About half the parolee population and two-thirds of the parole agents were gradually incorporated into a program which classified parolees according to supervision need and generally allowed for an increase in agent-parolee contacts. While contact requirements with parolees (and thus actual caseload size) varied according to the particular class, the general effect was a reduction in caseload size to an average of about 35 per Work Unit parole agent, as compared to an average of about 70 cases per Conventional Unit parole agent (those agents still operating under the older supervision model). The objective of the program was improved parole performance; it was hypothesized that Work Unit agents, being in greater contact with and generally more aware of the adjustment of their clients, would be in a better position to decide when a technical prison return was appropriate and would also, by virtue of their increased awareness of the behavior of parolees and additional time available to devote to work developing community-based programs, be able to curtail violations.

The performance of parole agents on the case recommendation task was examined by whether the agent was operating within the new reduced caseload program or the older program. It was hypothesized by the authors that since, on the ten test cases, all agents would be equally "aware" of these parolees' adjustments at the point of violation, Work Unit agents, with their supposedly greater knowledge of and experience in utilizing community resources, would be more likely to decide they could still handle a case, and therefore more likely than Conventional agents to recommend continue.

In Table 14, the parole offices have been listed according to their designation at the time of data collection and rank-ordered on the basis of the performance of their agents on the case recommendation task. Offices designated as mixed are those which contained parole agents with both Work Unit and Conventional caseloads.

TABLE 14

"CONTINUE" RECOMMENDATIONS BY OFFICE SUPERVISION TYPE

Highest Ten Offices	Next Highest Nine Offices	Next Lowest Nine Offices	Lowest Ten Offices
1. Work Unit	11. Work Unit	20. Work Unit	29. Conventional
2. Conventional	12. Conventional	21. Conventional	30. Work Unit
3. Work Unit	13. Conventional	22. Work Unit	31. Mixed
4. Conventional	14. Mixed	23. Conventional	32. Work Unit
5. Work Unit	15. Mixed	24. Work Unit	33. Work Unit
6. Conventional	16. Work Unit	25. Conventional	34. Mixed
7. Work Unit	17. Work Unit	26. Mixed	35. Work Unit
8. Conventional	18. Work Unit	27. Work Unit	36. Conventional
9. Conventional	19. Work Unit	28. Work Unit	37. Conventional
10. Work Unit			38. Work Unit

From Table 14, it is apparent that there was little difference between Work Unit and Conventional offices in parole agent response to standard case stimuli. Agents in Conventional Unit offices had a somewhat higher average on number of cases continued (3.39 vs. 3.23 in Work Unit), and a slightly higher proportion of these agents gave an above median number of continue recommendations (42 percent vs. 39 percent in Work Unit). The direction of the obtained difference is contrary to that expected, but the difference is not statistically significant. Agents in mixed units (most such offices are semi-rural) were least inclined to continue the test cases (average 3.06 continued; percent agents above median, 29 percent). It should be emphasized that at the time these data were collected, the Work Unit Program had been in operation less than a year.

Given the amount of time needed for implementing a new program, it may be somewhat unrealistic to expect any impact from their Work Unit experience on the kinds of decisions that the agents were required to make in this study.

The data were also examined to determine whether the supervisors of Work Unit offices were seen by their agents ("Does your supervisor favor continuation?") any differently than Conventional office supervisors, and again, no difference was found.

Discussion of Findings on Hypothetical Performance. The situation prepared by the investigators is, of course, an artificial one; responses to questionnaire items and judgments about what one would do with a case based simply on knowledge from a report do not have any necessary bearing on what happens in real life. While the test cases selected appear to cover a wide range on a "continue-likelihood" scale from one which 90 percent of agents say they would retain on parole to one which 93 percent say they would return, there is at this time little knowledge about just how representative the test case parolees are of those to be found in the actual parole population. It seems likely, however, that the ten cases are not typical but are, for the most part, "marginal" types. Probably the majority of actual cases of violation are more "clear-cut" in that parole agents would have less difficulty agreeing with one another about whether continue or return was the appropriate disposition. The investigators did believe, and some evidence from the pilot study offered support for such a belief, that even though they were working with "artificial" data which might exaggerate real differences, these data correspond to the actual state of affairs. Additional findings relevant to this issue are contained in the next section of this report.

Other concerns may be raised about how the findings of the previous section are to be interpreted, quite apart from the issue of their bearing upon actual performance. First, the demonstration of association between variables is not in itself proof of a causal connection between the two, and even if causality is presumed, the question of the direction in which the variables are working still remains. Another issue has to do with the relative "importance" of the various factors found to be associated with the criterion. In regard to the latter issue, the authors acknowledge that, with the relatively large sample size used in the present study, relatively small differences between groups are necessary for the demonstration of statistically significant findings. (For this reason, the differences in percents between groups have been presented for most of the findings as well as the test of statistical significance.) Further, there is no intention to suggest that, because one factor produces an association significant at a lower probability level than another, it is inherently a more important determinant. Thus, for example, it is acknowledged that the association between "belief about supervisor" and agents' case recommendations ($p < .005$), as compared with that between agent "value" and case recommendation ($p < .10$), may be a function of how the items were worded, and does not mean that agents pay more attention to what their supervisor wants or expects than they do to their own sense of what is "right."

In regard to the matter of causality, the authors are content to assert "here are some things that go together" and to suggest that common orientations develop among members of a unit office which make that office different from other offices. Whether this results from exposure to and experience with a particular community or particular types of parolees, or from reciprocal influences between agent and supervisor, or selection of agents from particular backgrounds, etc., is not at issue in this report. The variables selected for study have types of connection for which plausible explanations exist, but the nature of these ties will remain open to speculation unless more controls are introduced. With these disclaimers now made, the authors will present their own interpretation of the findings in the final section of this report (Discussion).

RESULTS--ACTUAL PERFORMANCE

The Outcome Criteria. For the purpose of documenting whether the measures applied in the current investigation bear any relationships to what was actually happening in parolee violation and recidivism, the data were compared with that available on all parolees released from prison to California supervision in 1965--the year in which the "hypothetical" data were collected. Each parolee was followed for one year subsequent to his release from prison, and the most serious disposition which he received during that period was recorded. Since the hypothetical data were collected in late September 1965, this meant that some of the parolees were released ten months prior to, and would be followed two months subsequent to, the time of questionnaire administration, while others would not yet be released for two months and were consequently followed to a point fourteen months after the agents were studied. Most of the parolees were between these extremes and therefore more closely anchored in time to the hypothetical data.

Material was available on 7,301 parolees, classified by the parole unit office to which they were released.[6] Two indicators of parole performance at one year were selected for examination. The first indicator, and the one most obviously relevant to the hypothetical data, was return to prison to finish term--an administrative disposition within the authority of the parole board which can occur subsequent to a law infraction or technical violation. These prison returns are to be distinguished from returns to prison with new commitment--a court action taken subsequent to a felony conviction occurring during parole. The second indicator selected, favorable parole outcome, is accorded to a parolee who, throughout one year subsequent to release, has had no difficulty or only minor difficulty (e.g., suspended jail sentences, jail sentence under 90 days, misdemeanor probation). The problem focused on was whether the number of continue recommendations made in the test situation by the agents in the individual offices was related to the percentage of technical returns or favorable outcomes for those offices.

While the two outcome criteria, technical prison return and favorable outcome, are mutually exclusive in regard to any given parolee, there is no necessary inverse relationship between these two measures in terms of parole office performance. One might expect that unit offices with a higher technical return rate would consequently have a lower overall rate of favorable outcomes. It has, however, been argued that an office can, through judiciously invoking a technical return, offset some other unfavorable outcome, thereby nullifying any decrease in (and conceivably increasing) its favorable outcome rate. (See section entitled Pilot Studies: Community Factors, for findings related to this topic.) On the 1965 outcome data, a comparison was made of office performance on these two criteria (median test) and no significant association was found (X^2, 1 d.f. = 2.64, $p < .20$, two-tailed).

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[6] Jaman, Dorothy R. "Parole Outcome for Six Years of Felon Releases to California Parole," staff report, CDC Research Division Measurement Unit, October 1967.

Caseload Size and Parole Performance. In an earlier section of this report (Caseload Size and Recommendations), the Work Unit Program of parole supervision was described and contrasted with the more traditional Conventional supervision program. In this section the outcomes of parolees released from prison to these two forms of supervision will be examined in order to provide a base for evaluating the later comparison of outcome against agent responses to questionnaire items and test cases.

There were 2,948 prison releases to Work Unit parole supervision in 1965, and 4,353 to Conventional supervision. The performance figures for the two types of supervision, based on a one-year cohort exposure period, are presented in Table 15.

TABLE 15

ACTUAL PAROLE PERFORMANCE BY CASELOAD SIZE

		Outcome	
Type of Parole Supervision	Number Released	Favorable	Technical Return
Work Unit Supervision	2948	65.8%	15.7%
Conventional Supervision	4353	62.6%	14.4%
Total	7301	63.9%	15.0%

The differences in performance between the two types of supervision appear slight. Nevertheless, the 3.2% advantage in favorable outcome of Work Unit over Conventional is statistically significant (X^2, 1 d.f. = 7.70, $p < .005$, one-tailed). In interpreting these data, however, it must be remembered that selection practices were operative in the assignment of parolees to one or the other of these programs, and that the two populations are not directly comparable. For example, all cases classified as possessing a high violence potential were assigned to Work Unit programming, and the Work Unit population was found to be composed of better-risk parolees, as measured on an actuarial prediction device (California Base Expectancy 61A). When controls for parolee risk level were introduced, the difference in favorable outcome between Work Unit and Conventional Unit was erased, and the rate of technical prison return was found to be significantly lower ($p < .01$) with Conventional supervision.

Early indications of these unintended outcome trends had been observed toward the end of 1965. These signs, together with additional material available to the chief of the Paroles Division--his own examination of violation reports and observation of decision processes during parole board hearings, his awareness of the trend over recent years for the technical return rate to progressively increase while the returns to prison with new commitment failed to decline, and his exposure to the findings of the present study as they were being assembled--led him to the conclusion that the objectives of the Work Unit Program were being misinterpreted by agents in the field. It appeared to him that they were expending their increased resources toward the aim of more control, rather than utilizing them for the development of community-based programs and alternatives to incarceration. The chief then went out into the field, assembling office supervisors to discuss these beliefs and informing them that ongoing review and appraisal of performance would receive heavier emphasis in the future. Subsequent to this tour by the chief, a dramatic decline in the technical return rate of Work Unit offices occurred, as well as a similar but less marked decline in the Conventional offices. Though these initial trends diminished over time, they illustrate the importance of parole agent orientation as a factor affecting recidivism rates. Whether the effect is an intervening one which involves altering parolee adjustment, or a direct one involving only the parole agent's choice of appropriate disposition at the point of violation, or some combination of the two is an open question.

The phenomenon of increased violation rates with a reduction in caseload size has also been observed in another setting--the Federal probation system.

> "The findings in our preliminary evaluation of 'intensive,' 'ideal,' and 'minimum' supervision caseloads raise some serious questions about the nature and efficiency of the prevailing models of supervision...cases randomly assigned to these caseloads, despite substantial differences in the supervision effort, exhibit violation rates which are not significantly different from one another...the minimum supervision caseload has a violation rate of 22.2 percent; the 'ideal' caseload, a violation rate of 24.3 percent; and the 'intensive' caseload, a violation rate of 37.5 percent...in the 'ideal' caseloads some five or six times as much attention, as measured by direct contact with the offender and with others about him, did not produce a reduction in violations; and in the 'intensive' caseloads, despite fourteen times as much attention as provided the minimum supervision cases, the violation rate not only failed to decline significantly, but increased with respect to technical violations...we would generalize that technical violations are a direct function of the amount of supervision provided since the probation and parole officer have more awareness of the existence of technical violations. With increased supervision, technical violations become an important and identifiable factor in the overall violation rate... Perhaps the officer should serve as the pivotal point or catalyst in the activation of the community and its resources in reintroducing the offender to the community and observing him as a member thereof, thereby reducing his dependence upon the correctional system. This approach might also reduce the influence of the labeling process which constantly defines those under supervision as 'criminal.'"[7]

The position taken by the above authors in the face of findings not dissimilar from the early findings on Work Unit is in many ways akin to the view held by the chief of the California Parole and Community Services Division.

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[7] Lohman, J.D., Wahl, A., Carter, R. M., & Lewis, S. P. "The Intensive Supervision Caseload: A Preliminary Evaluation," The San Francisco Project, Report No. 11, March 1967, p. 37.

Hypothetical Recommendations and Actual Outcome. The parole unit offices were divided into those above and those at or below the median on continue recommendations offered by parole agents in the test situation, and two types of determination were then made for these districts from the actual 1965 outcome data: (1) the offices' locations above or below the median on the actual outcome, and (2) the number of parolees in these offices who received the criterion disposition. The findings for the second type of comparison appear in Table 16 for both technical prison return and favorable outcome.

TABLE 16

HYPOTHETICAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTUAL OUTCOME

Office Performance on Test Cases	Number Released	Outcome at One Year Technical Returns		Favorable	
Above Median Continued (18 offices)	3810	525	(13.8%)	2482	(65.1%)
At or Below Median Continued (20 offices)	3491	564	(16.2%)	2181	(62.5%)
Total	7301	1089	(14.9%)	4663	(63.9%)

The more continue-oriented offices, as measured by parole agents' recommendations on ten case stimuli, had a significantly higher proportion of favorable parolee outcome for cases released in the same year (X^2, 1 d.f. = 5.51, $p < .01$, one-tailed), and a significantly lower proportion of parolees returned to prison to finish term (X^2, 1 d.f. = 7.92, $p < .005$, one-tailed). Thus, agent behavior in an artificial test-taking situation is found to be associated with actual recidivism rates, lending support to the hypothesis that formal parole violations are a function of decision-maker judgment as well as an index of parolee performance.

In regard to the magnitude of differences between high and low continue-oriented offices, some points of reference may be helpful. Offices above the median on continue recommendations for test cases show a 2.6 percent lower technical return rate and a 2.4 percent higher favorable outcome rate than offices at or below the median. Had the lower group of offices performed at the same rate as the higher, there would have been 82 fewer technical returns to prison and 92 more favorable outcomes. In terms of the monetary cost of imprisonment vs. parole supervision or other community services, this difference would represent a substantial savings. Another perspective regarding the size of the obtained differences is provided by an answer to the question, considering only the actual outcome rates, just how great is the difference between the performances of those offices above the median on these rates as compared with offices at or below the median? The answers are 6.4 percent for technical prison returns (12.4% vs. 18.8%), and 6.9 percent for favorable outcome (68.1% vs. 61.2%). Thus, the differences obtained by classifying offices on the case recommendation task should be viewed against the maximum difference attainable under these conditions (i.e., 2.6% obtained vs. 6.4% limit for technical return and 2.4% obtained vs. 6.9% limit on favorable outcome). One may legitimately wonder whether, since the limiting differences are so small, there is really any point in paying so much attention to performance variation among parole offices. The answer is definitely yes. Several considerations are relevant to this question. First, as has been earlier acknowledged, since the majority of decisions about continuing cases on parole or returning them to prison probably pose little uncertainty, variability in case recommendation can be expected to occur only on cases which are more or less marginal. However, the problem of defining marginality has not been solved. Second, the differences in percent have been presented using all outcomes as a base, rather than the criterion outcome (i.e., technical return). For a one-year follow-up period, a fairly small minority of releases become involved in an incident which necessitates that a violation report be written. Consequently, it is primarily in relation to only a minority of cases that decision choices, and office differences, can be important. The magnitude of differences is underestimated because the rate measure "assumes" opportunity for such decisions on all releases, rather than on all violations. Thus, suppose that the low continue offices had performed at the same level as high continue offices on the technical return rate and returned 82 fewer parolees (482 rather than 564). Viewed against this base, 15 percent of the cases considered were marginal ones who would have been continued rather than returned. Third, a median split provides a conservative index of the differences among offices. For one year outcomes on 1965 prison releases, individual parole office technical return rates ranged from 9.3 percent to 28.7 percent, and favorable outcome rates ranged from 54.5 percent to 73.3 percent.

Agent Value and Belief, and Actual Parole Outcome. In earlier pages of this report, two questionnaire items were described, compared with one another, checked against hypothetical case recommendations, and finally combined to provide three basic types:

1. Agent values continue and believes supervisor favors it.

2. Disparity between agent value and belief about supervisor regarding continue.

3. Agent does not value continue or believe supervisor favors it.

For the purpose of testing these questionnaire responses against actual parole performance, the 38 parole offices were cross-classified in the three types with a reliance upon whether the office was above or below the median on each of the two measures. This procedure generated nine type 1 offices, eight type 3 offices, and twenty-one type 2 offices. Within type 2, the disparate class, were ten offices of the agents-favor supervisor-disfavors subtype, and eleven of the reverse subtype. In Table 17, actual parole performance is examined in terms of technical return and favorable outcome rates across the three basic office types for the 1965 prison releases.

TABLE 17

ACTUAL PAROLE PERFORMANCE VS. AGENT VALUE AND BELIEF ABOUT SUPERVISOR

Office Type	Number Released	Outcome at One Year	
		Technical Returns	Favorable
1. Both Agents and Supervisor Favor Continue	2146	278 (13.0%)	1399 (65.2%)
2. Disparity Between Agents and Supervisor Regarding Continue	3587	553 (15.4%)	2296 (64.0%)
3. Neither Agents Nor Supervisor Favor Continue	1568	258 (16.5%)	968 (61.7%)
Total	7301	1089 (14.9%)	4663 (63.9%)

Statistically significant differences were found to exist among office types on each of the outcome criteria (technical return, X^2, 2 d.f. = 10.4, $p < .005$, one-tailed; favorable outcome, X^2, 2 d.f. = 4.75, $p < .05$, one-tailed). Unit parole offices, classified in terms of whether the agents value and believe their supervisor to favor continuation of cases on parole, provide actual parole outcomes in correspondence with their orientation. Within type 2, the two office subtypes produce identical technical return rates (15.4 percent) while a 64.8 percent favorable outcome rate exists for the supervisor-favors agents-disfavor subtype, as compared to 63.1 percent for the reverse subtype.

DISCUSSION

In 1967, there were 7,584 adult male felons admitted to California state prisons. One out of four of these men (1,867) were administrative re-admissions--cases returned to prison by the parole board for infractions or faulty adjustment on parole. An additional 11 percent of the admissions (847) were also parole violators, but these were judicial re-admissions--cases returned by the courts on a new felony commitment. With 25 percent of prison intake in the hands of parole board members, it is important to examine the process by which parole revocation occurs.

The revocation decision is, in part, a penalty and, in part, a prediction. One problem is to decide whether the immediate act or the chronic maladjustment which precipitated the violation report warrants, in itself, imposing the punishment of further incarceration. The other problem is an attempt to foresee whether, if the man were continued under parole supervision, future incidents of a still more serious nature would be likely to occur. In weighing this risk, limited-term protection can be purchased by reimprisonment, which postpones the opportunity for new violations to occur, but may increase the likelihood of their eventual occurrence by interruption in the process of offender readjustment to the community. Maintenance of an offender in a prison is over three times as costly as maintaining him on parole ($50/mo. vs. $166/mo. for the California Department of Corrections), but the cost to society of new crimes can also be great. Under conditions of potentially great loss and uncertainty about the likelihood of its occurrence, one is tempted toward cautious solutions and conservative decisions. In buying insurance for awhile against a few, it is probable that many parolees who pose no serious threat are also reincarcerated; in the absence of sufficient information, there is a dilemma for decision-makers about where the balance is to be struck.

This study of the revocation decision discussed at length in this report raises serious doubts about the reliability and validity of the decision process within correctional systems.

The present study has demonstrated marked inconsistencies in judgment among parole agents about the appropriate case disposition to be made after a parolee incident. The decision task with which the agents were presented might be considered artificial and unfair, and designed to promote uncertainty and lack of reliability; however, the task is a good simulation of the real decision task with which the parole board is routinely faced. It is true that the parole board members have more information available at the decision point (i.e., a case history of the subject's past prison experience and earlier social adjustment), but it is unlikely that this older source of information has much separate impact on the decisions, given the fact that a high correspondence exists between those decisions and the parole agent's recommendation on the violation report. It is accepted that uncertainty may have been increased because of the types of case on which judgments were to be made (they may be atypical, and more "marginal" than the everyday distribution of violators) and that the findings consequently exaggerate the level of disagreement that might be routinely expected. Regardless of the extent to which this is so, findings from that "artificial" situation have been shown to correspond with differences on actual revocation rates produced by the same parole agents--suggesting that the marginal case is commonly confronted in real practice.

Parole agents appear to be quite susceptible to influence about the type of case recommendation they will make, even though recommendations are to be based on their professional judgment. There are tendencies toward agreement among agents within a given office, but large differences in recommendation patterns between offices. While there is some indication that the agent's personal background (his educational specialty and prior types of job) has a bearing on these judgments, and that his current value orientation is involved, the most definite correlate shown in the present study was the agent's assessment of his supervisor's orientation. Further indication of this willingness to provide (or at least capability of providing) expected parolee performances was yielded by the definite fall in the actual revocation rate subsequent to the present study. That drop is attributable to increased pressure upon agents to explore alternate solutions at the community level which would permit continued parole supervision for many types of violator--a pressure originating from headquarters and transmitted through the unit supervisors. Whether these pressures are formally or informally exerted, the response to them can markedly shift the overall rate of revocation; it does not necessarily follow that variability in judgment or recommendation among parole agents will be reduced. In the two years subsequent to the 1965 study on which this report is based, considerable attention was directed by the agency to the matter of case decisions--reports by agents were subjected to closer scrutiny at each level of review, and training sessions for agents were focused upon case reporting and recommendation. This emphasis might be expected to increase the reliability of judgment. However, when the ten test cases from the 1965 study were re-administered in late 1967 and early 1968, variability in recommendation pattern was still quite evident (Table 19).

TABLE 19

DISTRIBUTIONS FOR CONTINUE RECOMMENDATIONS

ON TEN TEST CASES

	1965	1967*	1968*
Number Continued	All Subjects	Experienced Agents	New Agents
Ten	0.0%	1.5%	4.2%
Nine	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Eight	0.6%	4.4%	4.2%
Seven	2.2%	13.2%	12.5%
Six	8.2%	19.1%	12.5%
Five	11.3%	19.1%	16.7%
Four	21.1%	20.7%	20.8%
Three	27.6%	17.6%	24.9%
Two	16.7%	4.4%	4.2%
One	10.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Zero	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The average number of cases continued was considerably higher than before--4.87 for new agents who had not been present for the earlier study, and 4.97 for experienced agents undergoing re-test; the average in 1965 had been 3.27. Seventy-one percent of the new agents, and 78 percent of the experienced ones continued four or more of the ten cases, compared to only 38 percent in 1965. Despite this marked shift in the central tendency--or overall "revocation rate"--on these cases, the range of response was still high, as is evident in Table 19 above.

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*These findings are based on samples--all experienced agents in Region II, and all new agents in Region III. Region III had become a "super-region" by 1968, and some of these newer agents had been inherited from Region V through reorganization, but had not had more than two years in the division.

One of the main difficulties facing correctional administrators in their attempts to improve effectiveness of operations has resulted from the failure to systematically record and analyze the material on which decisions at critical choice points are made. Ordinarily, when such efforts are made, the energy is misspent by a concentration of attention on output (the number of dispositions of a given sort by parole board members) with almost no attention devoted to the extent of its correlation with input (parole agent recommendations) or to the substance of that input (reported information characteristics which may have little reliability or actual relevance). This paper represents an attempt to shift the focus to factors which affect characteristics of the input. This study also reaffirms the misgivings that many writers in the field have expressed about using parole "success" in the traditional way as a criterion of program effectiveness. It is obvious that parole "success" is determined by many factors, some of which are unrelated to program. Therefore, it seems imperative to continue working toward the development of a more refined index of parole outcome--one that excludes the kinds of factors related to decision-making that are discussed in this study.